



MEMORANDUM

To: Representative Tim Melton, Chairman
Members of the House Education Committee

From: Jim Sandy, Executive Director, Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence *JMS*
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Subject: HB 4042 (Lemmons) Education; attendance; compulsory attendance age; increase to age 18

Date: April 11, 2007

The purpose of this memo is to inform you that the Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence (MBLEE) are opposed to increasing the legal dropout age to eighteen years old. While the proposal may be based on good intentions, it is a premature action that will have little impact and does not address the issues which cause the problem in the first place.

It should be made clear from the outset that the MBLEE position is not based on workforce needs. None of the corporations represented by MBLEE employ students that dropout of school. On the contrary; we actively support programs aimed at eliminating the high school dropout problem.

MBLEE members reviewed the proposal and background information from a number of states that are also considering making this change. The group concluded that simply increasing the legal dropout age to 18, as recommended, is not a solution to the Michigan's problem. Under the current law, it is estimated that approximately 20,000 students between the ages of 13 and 15 drop out of the Michigan system each school year. There is little or no enforcement of the current statute and school systems have almost completely eliminated the concept of using truant officers.

The MBLEE Committee recommends that before the State of Michigan acts to increase the legal dropout age to 18 it should:

- Institute initiatives such as "graduation coaches" that work with students identified as being "at-risk" of dropping out. Each student should have an adult advocate and schools should establish early intervention systems.
- Create a more extensive system of optional vocational and technical training for 16-year-olds that is relevant.
- Modify the current system of community colleges to accept students who feel they no longer fit in high schools.
- Consider establishing the "middle college" for students that may be at risk.
- Hold schools accountable for establishing student retention programs and use an average daily attendance count for reimbursement purposes. An average daily attendance count will encourage schools to focus on getting students to school every day not just on the state designated count day.
- Develop a system of enforcement and penalties for students that dropout early.
- Implement the accelerated learning program and fully integrate the 21st Century Skills Applied Learning Core.
- Require would-be dropouts to enroll in GED certificate programs.

The Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence recognize that there are many reasons why students choose to drop out of school and believe that those reasons should be addressed or the current requirement enforced before any change is made to the law.